

Well done, Governor Brewer

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Well, good for Jan Brewer. Yesterday, the Republican governor of Arizona [vetoed a bill](#) allowing business owners to discriminate against customers on religious grounds. The bill [wasn't explicitly, exclusively aimed at gays and lesbians](#), but come on—it was aimed at gays and lesbians, [part of a multistate effort](#) to create broad protections for people who don't want to serve same-sex couples.

The electoral-politics-focused, not-all-that-antigay Republican establishment stepped in to kill the Arizona bill, and [Jon Stewart is not impressed](#). These GOP leaders should be speaking out against the bill's aims directly, not simply pointing out that it's unnecessary, bad for business, etc.! And well, sure. But I find it hard to get worked up about politicians doing the right thing for the wrong reasons and then giving the cameras politically calculated talking points instead of pure moral outrage. This is pretty much how it usually works (when they do the right thing at all). If you want your politicians with purely moral motivations, stop watching actual Washington and go binge-watch *The West Wing*.

Will the Republican impulse that got the Arizona bill vetoed continue to win out against the Republican impulse that created the bill in the first place? It's hard to say, and the fall midterms could change the math. But [as Paul Waldman points out](#), it's notable that the Republicans are the more divided party right now—that's a big turnaround in recent years. (Not that the Democrats are [all that unified](#), but still.) Rolling back LGBT rights has never been a high priority to the John McCains of the world, and these days it's a high priority to [a quickly shrinking share of the electorate](#).

Among that shrinking group, much of the energy is now around buzz-phrase-of-the-era "religious liberty." (From Miranda Blue: "[There are two Christian right movies called 'Persecuted' coming out this year](#).") In general I agree with those such as [CCblogger Emily Heath](#) who maintain that **other people having rights is not an infringement on your own rights**, that "religious liberty is never secured by a campaign of religious superiority." I'd add that it's hard to imagine anyone conflating

religious liberty with religious superiority outside the context of a dominant, privileged faith in a culture with a great deal of religious liberty and diversity.

But some of the best comment on this episode isn't primarily about constitutional liberty. It's about what it means to follow Jesus in the public square. [One good post comes from Rachel Held Evans](#):

As Christians, our most “deeply held religious belief” is that Jesus Christ died on the cross for sinful people, and that in imitation of that, we are called to love God, to love our neighbors, and to love even our enemies to the point of death.

So I think we can handle making pastries for gay people.

And I think that refusing to serve gay and lesbian people, and advancing legislation that denies others their civil liberties in response to perceived threats to our own, does irreparable damage to our witness as Christians and leaves a whole group of people feeling like second-class citizens, not only in our country, but also in the Kingdom. **There may be second-class citizens in the U.S. and in Uganda and in Russia, but there should be no second-class citizens in the Kingdom.**

Trouble is, a lot of Christian conservatives already seem to think *they're* second-class citizens, and that the advance of LGBT rights just confirms this. But it isn't true. They are Christians in a country where Christians are plentiful and overrepresented in the halls of power, and where religious liberty protections are actually quite robust. Pretending otherwise is not just a problem for LGBT citizens who want wedding cakes or photos, or for Republican party leaders who want to win elections. It is, as Evans says, a poor witness to the gospel.